

TESTIMONY FOR LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION
ON
HOW TO MEET THE NEED FOR QUALITY TEACHERS
February 21, 2001 (Sacramento)

Vaughn Next Century Learning Center is an overcrowded, large inner city school located in Pacoima, a designated "Empowerment Zone" due to its extreme poverty and high crime status. Low achievement was the pattern. In 1993, we converted to a charter school sponsored by the Los Angeles Unified School District. We serve 1260 Pre-K to 5th grade students (94.9% Hispanic, 5% African-American, 0.1% Asian; 76.4% or 877 students are English learners who are Spanish-speaking; 97.4% free/reduced lunch). Since the school opened in 1950, Vaughn has been a "hard to staff" school. Not until the past five years could we begin to meet the challenges related to school environment, teacher training, compensation, and school administration. We are now meeting with sustained success.

Number of certificated teachers - 69

Number of certificated administrator - 2

Number of part time specialists - 6

Teaching Environment and School Culture

1. Teacher teaming and goal-oriented collaboration

Our teachers form teams of three teachers responsible for sixty students. Each team consists of an experienced teacher with ten or more years of teaching experience. He or she is partnered up with a teacher with three to five years of experience and one emergency-credentialed, beginning teacher. Each team establishes team goals. The focused, targeted collaboration includes frequent communication, weekly planning, search for common solutions, and mutual support and help so as to reach collective goals. We do not undervalue research or the best kind of staff training, but we must recognize that teachers learn best from each other. There is strong relationship between the right kind of teamwork and improvements for both teachers and students. The benefits include gains in student achievement, higher-quality solutions to problems, increased confidence among teachers, more systematic assistance to beginning teachers, an expanded pool of ideas, materials and methods, and the ability to examine and test them.

2. Effective deployment of human resources

Teachers can share full-time positions in various ways including four-day work week, one semester assignment, six to ten-week positive switch between a general and a special education teacher. Our assistant principal position has been converted to a Director of Instruction position. Every two grade-levels have a resource specialist and an instructional coordinator. In addition to a full-time library teacher, six part-time specialists co-teach with the teachers (music, science, technology, fine arts, physical education, and museum studies). This structure strengthens the schoolwide teamwork.

3. Multiple career opportunities for teachers within the same school

Paraprofessionals with teaching career goals are provided with a flexible work schedule and better compensation so they can complete their studies in a timely manner. Each year, two or three qualified paraprofessionals are selected to fill vacant teacher positions. Oftentimes, the experienced teachers who train them become their team leaders. Currently, we have as many as eight state preschool classes and four Head Start sessions. Our preschool and Head Start teachers are guaranteed elementary teaching positions upon completion of elementary certification requirements. Being a large school and a soon-to-be prekindergarten to 12th grade learning center, teachers have ample opportunities to rotate to other grade levels and subjects. In addition, teachers with specific expertise such as special education, technology, English language development can teach university courses at Vaughn. Both UCLA and the California State University, Northridge schedule eight different credential classes on campus in the evening and/or during weekends. Our teachers on emergency credential take some of these classes free of charge in exchange for facility use.

4. Gift of time

Our school calendar provides four pupil-free days before school begins and ten minimum days throughout the year. In addition to daily preparation time of thirty minutes, teachers are released an hour a week for team planning. We are still seeking ways to provide more plan time and think time.

Teacher Training and Professional Growth

1. Teaching standards that link to students' learning standards

Teachers need ongoing feedback about their work and student progress. During the past three years, our teachers have developed and adopted a set of teaching standards related to lesson planning, classroom management, and various subject areas that are linked to the students' learning standards. Levels of performance in each area are clearly described using a 4-point scale with descriptive rubrics. Teachers know and understand the collective expectation they have established collectively. (Please visit our website for details www.vaughn.k12.ca.us.)

2. Assistance and performance review

We replaced the stult evaluation system with our Peer Assistance and Review System that takes place four times per year. Our teachers reflect on their own performance and rate themselves using the established teaching standards and scoring rubrics. Selected peer reviewers observe their colleagues and provide feedback as well as assistance. Instructional coordinators also conduct classroom visits and conferences with teachers on an ongoing basis. Beginning teachers are assigned one-to-one mentors. Elected grade-level chairpersons are responsible for ensuring that teachers understand and focus on grade-level standards. The Director of Instruction and the Principal conduct weekly visits, monitor progress of beginning teachers, and focus on schoolwide goals. Frequent flow of information and consistent feedback about progress is an important step for improvement.

3. Precise staff development

Not all the teachers need the same training. Based on individual teacher performance review, each teacher sets his/her specific professional growth goals with the instructional coordinator. Training opportunities include small group workshops, individualized conferencing, observing another teacher, participation in seminars, conducting research, use of technology, and the assignment of a teacher buddy. We generally spend 5% of our base revenue in staff development (approximately \$200,000 per year).

4. State initiative and focus on results

Teachers must base teaching decisions on solid data rather than on assumptions. Data help us monitor and assess student performance. The Governor's Professional Development Institutes provide results-focused programs for 70,000 teachers this year (AB 1116). We captured the opportunity and all our teachers participated in UCLA's "Focusing on Results" training program. This program focuses on:

- a. Using assessments linked to statewide standards to inform teaching practice,
- b. Implementing instructional practices that are grounded in current theory and research and developed by both teachers and university educators, and
- c. Building a school team that analyze student data and adjust instruction appropriately.

5. Certification and alternate paths

Since our teachers cannot participate in the district's intern program, some of our teachers join the university internship program. When needed, we utilize the state-adopted waiver program to retain one or two teachers who have demonstrated effective teaching skills and have not yet passed the MSAT. Our experience tells us that emergency-credentialed teachers are not necessarily ineffective teachers and fully-credentialed teachers are not necessarily effective teachers.

Teacher Compensation

The single-salary pay plan does not support standards-based instruction and does not work for Vaughn. In an effort to recruit and retain quality teachers, we developed a performance pay plan three years ago. (Please visit our website for details, www.vaughn.k12.ca.us.)

In addition to a base pay and extra compensation for certification and advanced degrees, we pay teachers the following:

1. Skills and knowledge pay

Level 1 skills include literacy, language arts, mathematics, working with special education students in an inclusive setting, classroom management, and lesson planning. A score of 2.5 or higher in the performance review earns \$3,800. An overall score of 3.0 in other subject matters (social studies, science, arts, English language learning,

physical education) earns another \$5,300. Finally, any fully credentialed teacher whose average in all of the areas is 3.5 or higher earns an additional \$4,000. The maximum in bonuses that a teacher can earn by getting top scores on every part of the knowledge and skills review is \$13,100.

2. Contingency-based awards

Teachers can earn a total of \$1,750 a year for achieving certain goals in the areas of student attendance, discipline, parental involvement, and for working in teams.

3. Schoolwide student achievement bonus

All teachers and administrators get an annual bonus of \$1,500 if the school as a whole meets the Academic Performance Index goal (API) set by the state regardless how much the state provides. Noncertificated staff and part-time staff members also earn a prorated amount.

4. Expertise compensation

Teachers in leadership roles including grade level chairs, committee chairs, peer reviewers, mentors, faculty representatives receive additional stipends. A teacher who sponsors after-school clubs, student government, field learning, or teaches intersession is compensated with \$3,500 - \$4,000.

5. Gainsharing

Unused sick days will continue to accrue and \$250 is provided for every ten unused days as an attendance award. A separate investment account with more than \$1,000,000 is set up to guarantee these bonuses when earned. Teachers share the accrued interests as a form of stock option. The amount is estimated at \$1,000 per year per teacher.

Based on payroll records (excluding expertise pay), a first year fully credentialed teacher earns \$46,000. A first year emergency-credentialed teacher earns \$39,000. A teacher with ten years of teaching experience and scores an average of 3.0 earns \$63,850.

6. Added benefits

To provide a further sense of security, we have purchased a long-term disability insurance policy for every teacher, which provides 60% of their full pay till age 65. In addition, we have set up an account with \$500,000 in the Los Angeles Teachers' Credit Union to guarantee health benefits after retirement. We are in the process of developing further benefits for teachers including college and childcare subsidies, cash reimbursement for out-of-pocket purchases for classroom use.

The Consortium of Policy Research in Education (a research team headed by professors of University of Pennsylvania, Harvard, Stanford, Michigan State, and University of Wisconsin) has included Vaughn as one of its case study sites during the past three years. The Consortium conducts yearly survey and interview of our teachers. (See our website www.wcer.wisc.edu/cpre for research findings.)

Administration and School Management

1. Distributed leadership

A supportive teaching environment, a focused teacher training system, and an adequate compensation plan cannot happen without good school leaders. Administrators at Vaughn realized long ago that sustained reform efforts rely on distributed leadership. Therefore, we have established three decision-making committees that form our governance body. Each committee consists of 50% staff and 50% parents/community members. The Curriculum and Instructional Committee is the driving force. It is responsible for curricular design, student learning standards and assessment, textbook selection, classroom organization, and teaching team formation. The Business and Operation Committee is responsible for all personnel and fiscal matters, staff evaluation, technology, safety, and facilities. The Partnership Committee is responsible for home-school-community programs, student discipline, parent education and involvement, and special events. Every three years, a teacher must serve in a committee for a two-year term. Teachers have decision-making authority as well as the responsibility to implement action plans.

Teachers with demonstrated skills as effective teachers based on our review system also serve as mentors and peer reviewers. Teachers with leadership skills usually become elected grade level chairpersons, faculty representatives, and committee chairpersons. In addition to a stipend, these teachers are provided with release time, administrative training, and opportunities to attend or present in conferences locally, nationally and internationally.

2. Tools for teachers to succeed

As an independent charter school, we have the flexibility to deploy human and fiscal resources to meet priority needs. To enable teachers to meet their professional goals and student achievement goals, Vaughn provides them with tools including class size of 20:1 in all grades, a fully-staffed counseling center, a site-based health clinic, a new library, a teacher resource center, adequate books, materials and supplies, after-school tutoring and homework clubs, a 200-day instructional calendar, and a qualified team of special education teachers who co-teach with the classroom teachers in an inclusive setting. We have also resolved the multitrack, overcrowding problem by building two new school buildings and increased the number of classrooms from 26 to 78.

3. Role of school principal and internal accountability

School principals must have clear authorities and responsibilities that focus on student outcomes and not bureaucratic compliance. Principals are faced with daily deadlines and paperwork. They respond to external accountability in the form of completing reports, answering to audits, submitting surveys and applications, developing mandatory plans and growth target. Principals often wonder, "When external accountability knocks, will anyone answer?" As a charter school principal who has the experience of a traditional principal, I recognize the significant differences. My role is to lead my staff to develop and consistently implement an internal accountability system that holds everyone accountable at Vaughn. This system defines the roles and

responsibilities of teachers, students, parents/families, administrators, and support staff. Everyone focuses on our schoolwide vision and mission, assertively solves problems, communicates needs, collects data, charts progress, makes continuous improvement, creates new dreams, and backs them up with actions. At the end of each day, the principal helps his/her school team celebrate the success.

Recommendations to state policy-makers

1. Allow alternative paths for teacher preparation and certification and re-examine the role of teacher-preparation institutions and the Commission on Teacher Credentialing.
2. Replace the current stult process and develop a more effective teacher evaluation system that clearly defines teaching standards, and adopt state initiatives that enable teachers to reach these standards.
3. Incentivize districts and teacher union to develop skills/knowledge compensation plan.
4. Revise school funding formula that allows the creation of smaller campuses.
5. Eliminate, or at least streamline, bureaucratic paperwork that prevents school principals from focusing on instruction.
6. Hold principals accountable and give them the authority to lead.

Conclusion

It is the unified and purposeful school culture that creates the collective high expectation of students and staff, collective high confidence among adults, and collective high degree of student progress.

Submitted by Yvonne Chan, Principal
Vaughn Next Century Learning Center
13330 Vaughn Street
San Fernando, CA 91340
Phone (818) 896-7461
Fax (818) 834-9036
e-mail vaughn@vaughn.k12.ca.us
www.vaughn.k12.ca.us